

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

***Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI)
Project Plan***

**Working Toward
Institutional Goals for Improvement**

Submitted to
KENTUCKY COUNCIL ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION
June 30, 2009

see blue.

Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI) Project Plan **Working Toward Institutional Goals for Improvement**

With the University's ongoing "War on Attrition" and the state's expansion of the Project Graduate initiative, the University of Kentucky will direct more attention to attracting and retaining adult learners. Not only will enhanced support of local adults who want a UK degree help further Kentucky's educational attainment goals but it will also help to meet the University's enrollment targets. The degree-seeking undergraduate adult learner population at UK is typically less than 10% - in 2007, around 8.5% of the University's 18,424 undergraduate degree-seeking student body was composed of those defined as "adult learners." The number at UK is small at least partially because courses, full degree programs, and services are not as available to this group as they need to be. According to the data gleaned from the ALFI Toolkit made available by the Council on Adult & Experiential Learning (CAEL), the University of Kentucky is not what CAEL would identify as an "adult friendly" campus. Administrators acknowledge that there is little explicit attention given to adult learners (or recognition of their life conditions) in the stated policies or procedures of the University. UK could be more "adult friendly" with some expense above and beyond the current investments in recruitment and retention efforts.

In the Spring of 2009, the University of Kentucky Survey Research Center conducted a telephone survey with UK undergraduate students aged 25 and older who were enrolled in the 2007 and the 2008 academic years and did not return for Spring 2009. Of the 957 degree-seeking students meeting the criteria, about 212 completed the SRC interviews. When asked to give the most important reason why they had not returned to UK to pursue their education, the most common reasons given for not returning were:

- Difficulty paying for my college education (27.8%)
- Difficulty balancing work, college, and family life (27.4%)
- The sequence of courses I needed was not offered (10.8%)
- Difficulty finding adequate childcare/difficulty caring for children or adult dependents (5.2% - combined 2 related categories)
- Change of major to one not offered at UK (3.9%)
- Problems at home (3.9%)
- Couldn't find help, e.g., tutoring and support services (2.4%)

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents disagreed with the statement that "UK offers a variety of distance learning online courses." Only a little more than half agreed that UK's traditional courses offered in evening and weekends were sufficient to meet adult students' needs. A general feeling of positiveness about UK came from the respondents – and the majority's memories of academic advising while on campus were positive. Together with the information gleaned from the ALFI Toolkit and subsequent discussion forums with students, faculty and staff, these findings guided the University's leadership in making decisions about how to address the needs of adult learners seeking baccalaureate degrees at UK.

The University of Kentucky plans to move forward with the following goals for improving recruitment and retention of adult learners. Working together with staff in Enrollment Management, the Office of Institutional Research and with faculty leadership in the colleges, the Office of Undergraduate Education will focus more attention on the unique needs of adult learners at the University of Kentucky.

Of the three major policy issues identified by the Kentucky Adult Learner Initiative – financial aid, flexible academic programming, and credit for prior learning – the second (flexible academic programming) has been identified by University leadership as the most critical for improvement at UK. In addition, the UK plan will address campus climate and other issues in the data and feedback resulting from the ALFI Toolkit, additional surveys, and discussion forums.

FINANCIAL AID FOR ADULT LEARNERS

A. *Current Status:* The current status of financial aid programs for adult learners at UK is not as robust as the University would hope. Given our charter as a state flagship and land-grant institution, the UK Office of Undergraduate Admissions continues to provide accessibility to students of all socio-economic statuses. Need-based aid eligibility standards are based on calculated financial need, federal aid program eligibility and awarding rules, and, in some cases, standardized test scores or some other objective criteria, e.g. resident of a particular Kentucky county for some need-based scholarships controlled by Student Financial Aid, enrollment in a particular college, etc. Every effort is made to maximize the assistance available to students. Students can appeal for an adjustment to their cost of attendance budget and for additional assistance to allow participation in educationally related programs. The consumer price index increase from December 2006 to December 2007 was 4.1%. Transportation and personal expenses were increased by this amount and rounded. Child care costs are allowed if the student provides documentation from the day care provider and completes the 'Certification of Child Care' form. UK will allow the amount of documented child care expense the student submits as the actual cost. This amount will be added to student's cost of attendance budget which may result in additional aid. Costs associated with the purchase/rental/leasing of a computer are eligible for inclusion in the cost of attendance budget via appeal by the student with appropriate documentation.

Current federal campus-based aid program allocations and limited institutional resources prevent UK from meeting the full need of all students. However, every effort is made to maximize the funding available to all low-income students and to award as much grant aid as possible given funding limitations. Restricted, private grant funds often replace loans and work in the student's financial aid package whenever possible. Using institutional funds, the Catalyst Scholarship (up to \$2,020) is awarded to KY resident students who are Pell eligible and whose income (student and spouse income if applicable) is at or below 150% of the HHS poverty levels. When the Catalyst Scholarship in combination with other aid creates an overaward, any loans in the student's package are reduced to eliminate the overaward and to preserve the maximum grant funds in the package. UK One Year Grants (up to \$1500;

also funded institutionally) may be awarded to juniors and seniors with remaining unmet need after consideration of \$4,500 of subsidized loans. The One Year Grant is targeted to help address annual tuition increases for those students with acceptable academic progress. Additional scholarships are awarded to needy students who also meet the following criteria:

- Freshmen: minimum ACT of 22 or minimum SAT of 1030
- Continuing students: 2.5 cum GPA

Strong sentiments were expressed by students in discussion forums held in Spring 2009 that there should be more state and institutional financial aid opportunities for adult and non-traditional students. While information about financial aid is widely available and Adult Student Services is located within the same division (Enrollment Management) as Student Financial Aid, adult students answering the ALFI survey do not seem to know how to access these resources. In addition to the new opportunities for adult learners eligible for the Project Graduate program, the University hopes to provide even greater flexibility in financial aid so that all degree-seeking adult students in the middle ranges of GPA are supported in some way (not just those with GPA of 3.5 and above).

- B. *Goals:* The University's goals are to increase financial aid opportunities for adult learners at UK within the guidelines and in support of the University's 2009-2014 Strategic Plan. Adult Student Services will review, revise and refine merit and need based financial aid strategies to increase yield and enhance diversity of scholarship awards to nontraditional aged students and students enrolling non-traditionally. In addition, the University aspires to serve returning veterans in a personalized and full-service manner by becoming a member of the Yellow Ribbon Program (see www.gibill.va.gov/GI_BILL_Info/CH33/VRP/VRP_List.htm).
- C. *Plans to Achieve Goals:* The University plans to achieve these goals broadly with a new scholarship funding campaign starting this fall with the UK Office of Development. In a strategic effort to address the need for more targeted communications about financial aid, the staff in Adult Student Services will work with the staff in Undergraduate Education (especially the Director of Retention and Student Success) to track and communicate with adult learners on a regular basis. Enrollment Management will also convene focus groups of students, faculty and administrators to address financial aid issues; articulate reasons for each groups' perceptions and brainstorm solutions that address those issues. This work should then lead to the promotion and support of policies that (a) leverage new sources of funding, (b) offer flexible payment plans and other help in financing adult learning, and (c) encourage employer tuition assistance for workers. In addition, with the hiring of the new Veterans Resource Center Coordinator, the University is focusing on the recruitment and financial support needed by this particular group of adult learners who can succeed at UK.

FLEXIBLE ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING FOR ADULT LEARNERS

- A. *Current Status:* The current status of delivery modes or timing of academic programming is not particularly conducive for the needs of the adult learners seeking undergraduate

degrees at UK. Students, staff and faculty agreed that it is difficult to get all needed courses to complete degrees through available alternative course offerings (evening-weekend classes, distance learning, independent study); the particular need here is for selected academic departments to purposefully offer pre-scheduled sequences of courses that rotate through evenings and/or weekends. UK's traditional course-offering schedules are not attractive to adult students who drive to campus and those who have other requirements on their schedules typically prefer courses meeting for longer time-periods fewer times per week. Adult students typically also prefer intensive courses that complete their semesters in shorter periods than traditional 15-week terms. Too few UK faculty offer these alternatives for undergraduate degree-seeking students. Students and faculty feel that senior faculty are not available or incentivized to teach courses or offer full-degree programs that are most accessible for adult learners. For example, colleges are financially incentivized under the current policy to direct the least senior faculty with the largest classes to teach during the summer instead of conducting needs analyses so to provide courses in sequence most needed by their students. In the table below, one can see that the percentage of adult learners at UK doubles during summer semesters, showing that the summer schedule is important to their success:

**Number of Undergraduate Students
Who Took at Least One 100 to 400 Level Course**

	Summer I 2008		Summer II 2008		Fall 2008		Spring 2009	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Adult Learners	394	16.9	518	15.9	1,618	8.8	1,538	9.0
Traditional Students	1,941	83.1	2,748	84.1	16,852	91.2	15,654	91.1
Total	2,335	100	3,266	100	18,470	100	17,192	100.1

The existence of coherent, planned degree programs for adult students and those enrolling nontraditionally would lower university costs and increase income because students would know when needed courses will be offered and enroll in them when offered on a predetermined scheduled. The current system, on the other hand, in most instances offers random offerings not tied to planned sequences for degree completion. This lowers enrollment and income in specific course offerings and in the degree programs and leads to inefficient offerings of courses and use of faculty. According to the Office of Institutional Research, more UK adult learners are graduating from our professional schools, but there is a strong showing of successful completion of the baccalaureate degree from arts and sciences as well.

Recent degree production from each of the UK undergraduate colleges is shown in the table below:

2007 Undergraduate Degrees Awarded by College and by Age Status

COLLEGE	Summer 2007		Fall 2007		Spring 2008		Total Adult Learners	Total Trad'l Students	% of Adult Learners	Total Degreed Students
	Adult Learners	Trad'l Students	Adult Learners	Trad'l Students	Adult Learners	Trad'l Students				
Agriculture	20	72	25	119	36	249	81	440	0.18	521
Arts & Sciences	33	108	50	200	99	607	182	915	0.20	1,097
Business & Econ	10	55	25	138	28	394	63	587	0.11	650
Comm & Inf Studies	5	47	9	109	11	205	25	361	0.07	386
Design	1	6	4	12	17	78	22	96	0.23	118
Education	7	18	15	94	23	151	45	263	0.17	308
Engineering	14	18	20	67	37	166	71	251	0.28	322
Fine Arts	2	10	8	28	14	63	24	101	0.24	125
Health Sciences	1	11	3	.	8	53	12	64	0.19	76
Nursing	8	4	14	36	12	37	34	77	0.44	111
Social Work	4	2	10	5	10	30	24	37	0.65	61
TOTAL	105	351	183	808	295	2,033	583	3,192	0.18	3,775

- B. *Goals:* The University will work to offer more evening/weekend, summer, independent study and distance learning content – both individual courses that faculty want to offer and those specifically targeted by departments to allow students to complete full programs in the sequence they need. Adult students pursuing their first degree, second degree or degree-enhancement need access to a variety of courses to complete degrees. However, there are some programs and colleges at UK that are already poised to offer the flexible programming attractive to the adult learner. According to a data report from the Office of Institutional Research in May 2009, degree-seeking undergraduate students aged 25 and older congregate mostly in the following majors at UK:

- Accounting
- Art Studio
- Biological Sciences
- Business Administration/Management
- Civil Engineering
- Economics
- Elementary Education
- English
- Family Studies

- History
- Mechanical Engineering
- Nursing (both RN Training and Post RN)
- Political Science
- Psychology
- Social Work
- Sociology

The University plans to approach the leadership in these colleges and departments associated with these majors to ascertain best practices for success with adult learners and to encourage ways to grow adult learner populations. According to the UK Strategic Plan for 2009-14 (http://www.uky.edu/Provost/strategic_planning), the University aspires to raise graduation rates of baccalaureate students from 61% to 64% - and adult learners first starting their college careers will need to be a part of that increase. However, the University is best poised to support adult learners in the Project Graduate initiative and to recruit and retain those adults who have experienced college already. The University plans to increase bachelor's degrees awarded per academic year to 3,925 by 2014 (http://www.uky.edu/Provost/strategic_planning/metrics.htm), and the success of adult learners will be critical in achieving this goal.

- C. *Plans to Achieve Goals:* The University plans to explore ways in which selected departments and colleges can offer more evening/weekend, summer, independent studies and distance learning content – focusing on those specifically targeted by departments to allow students to complete full programs in the sequence they need. In order to develop and maintain competitive flexible programming, e.g., distance learning or accelerated programs, the University needs to emphasize those academic departments' strengths in relation to the market demands from our adult population.

The results of positive collaboration within the University and among Kentucky postsecondary institutions in non-duplicative programming will have less to do with the areas defined by geography and more to do with a best fit of faculty expertise, support services and market need. The Provost and college leadership will examine the current funding structure of Evening/Weekend, Summer, Independent Study and Distance Learning Programs, and realign to incentivize specifically targeted areas of study (to better serve targeted populations of adult learners). College leadership will use data gathered by newly acquired central resources (see section below on plans for changing campus climate) to decide the particular academic niches for programs targeting adult students and accommodate their needs.

CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING

A. *Current Status:* Credit for prior learning (CPL) at UK is handled by the Registrar at UK. The University of Kentucky's University Senate has guided methods for awarding credit for prior learning across all colleges with few restrictions and at no cost since 1972, including:

- CLEP exams
- DSST exams
- ACE military recommendations
- AP and International Baccalaureate exams
- Special Examinations (challenge exams) specific to credit-bearing courses

However, the University has not developed nor assessed learning outcomes associated with these CPL activities, and our faculty and staff would be willing to learn more about how to do this if offered the opportunity. During discussion forums and in surveys, the University community expressed the need for greater flexibility with general education requirements and more opportunities for credit for life experiences in professional schools – especially those under pressure from accreditation agencies to keep graduates' skills/knowledge up to date.

The University of Kentucky has an adult learner advocate centrally located on its campus and the Project Graduate initiative at UK has been greatly facilitated by the existence of the Adult Student Services with its extended hours, high-touch services and regular Back-to-School workshops for adults. Project Graduate is a statewide program which is a partnership between UK and the Council on Postsecondary Education and supported by the Lumina Foundation. Its mission is to bring Kentucky adults back to college who left UK without completing their bachelor's degree. Cecile McKinney is the UK contact for Project Graduate which currently focuses on re-recruiting those adult students with 90 or more earned credit hours but who have not earned a bachelor's degree at UK. In 2008 the University contacted 926 eligible students via letters and postcards. UK offers a simplified application and fee waiver as well as a degree audit (before application for admission) that shows the student exactly which courses are needed to complete a degree in their initial field of study or in another discipline. In December 2008, twenty-six of the eligible students graduated, and an additional six students graduated in May 2009. The University of Kentucky offers to those students identified in the Project Graduate program the following incentives for re-enrolling:

- A degree audit program (before they apply for admission) showing the student exactly which courses are needed to complete a degree in the initial field of study or in another discipline
- A simplified application for readmission (PDF) and waiver of the usual application fee
- Early admission and registration
- Special academic advisers trained to assist Project Graduate students with course scheduling and to explain requirements and university procedures
- An adult resource center, Adult Student Services, providing information, assistance, scholarships and support to UK students 25 and over – all contact and services are

- primarily available by phone, fax, email, online or mail – coming to campus is secondary if a participant wishes to do so
- Coordinated support via Student Financial Aid, Student Billing Services, Academic Enhancement’s peer tutoring in “The Study” and career counseling in the Stuckert Career Center

See more about the Project Graduate program at the website for Adult Student Services, <http://www.uky.edu/AdultSS/graduate.htm>.

- B. *Goals:* The University’s goals are to continue to support the great work being done across the University colleges for adults eligible for Project Graduate. According to the ALFI Toolkit’s cross-walk between the Institutional Self Assessment Survey and the Adult Learner Inventory, the use of technology was one of the strongest indicators of success for the University of Kentucky’s support for adult learners.
- C. *Plans to Achieve Goals:* The University plans to support the decision-making capabilities of the academic leadership in the colleges by providing additional, centralized resources to the degree-audit software currently in place. This would allow for greater flexibility and personalization of interactions with adult learners seeking degrees from the University. The Office of Enrollment Management will work with the Provost’s senior staff to search for and purchase licenses for software that improves the University’s current degree audit process. This new functionality should improve the intake process supporting adult learners in planning, especially as they move to the appropriate advisors in the colleges. This functionality will allow students and advisors to create and maintain a detailed term-by-term, multi-year academic path to graduation. This software should also support the goals set by the business plan in identifying demands for niche programs. The search process should end in a successful contract by June 30, 2010.

CAMPUS CLIMATE FOR ADULT LEARNERS

- A. *Current Status:* The current status of the campus climate at UK is described by the results of the ALFI Toolkit as not particularly “friendly” for adult learners. While the use of “Go Higher Kentucky” Course Applicability System (CAS) and UK’s degree audit system (APEX) are important steps in the intake and support for adult learners seeking a degree, UK staff and faculty do not regularly utilize a formal career planning (or portfolio) process that is easily portable for adult learners moving through the advising process from centralized intake recruitment and admissions to college and department level interactions with faculty. The University needs regular staff training on the unique needs of adult learners.
- B. *Goals:* The University would like to provide stronger intervention centrally upon re-enrollment of adult learners. For example, interpreting whether the student’s background or time away from the program would prevent them from re-entering a particular college. This way, the returning adult student would be placed into the appropriate college initially;

not just shuffled between colleges after the semester begins. Adult Student Services will support colleges as they work with adult learners by:

- a. encouraging/mentoring recruited (though not yet enrolled) students who regularly start out or return to college unsure of their competitiveness against younger students who have remained consistently enrolled through secondary school and college,
- b. surveying and consulting with enrolled students about their expectations for degrees offered at UK,
- c. consulting with admitted adult students about their past work experience and/or college transcripts and prepare degree audits using APEX,
- d. supporting (and overseeing effectiveness of) a formal program for peer mentoring and peer advisement of adult learners,
- e. advocating on behalf of individual students for non-traditional degree completion opportunities,
- f. gathering data on effectiveness and satisfaction rates of student support services in general (e.g., continuing to use the ALI survey on a regular basis, incorporating adult learner focused questions into University-wide surveys such as Freshman Survey, Graduating Survey and NSSE), and
- g. offering non-traditional office hours for support activities and personal consultations with adult students from any college.

In addition, Adult Student Services plans to expand the Project Graduate program marketing by adapting the See Blue campaign materials in ways that pay close attention to niche programs particularly useful for adult learners (using prepared educational plans similar to the BCTCblue+ Transfer Pathway Guides). Adult Student Services and Evening and Weekend Programs will focus especially on high-ability students enrolling non-traditionally.

- C. *Plans to Achieve Goals:* The University will provide additional centralized resources for the Project Graduate program by improving the enrollment and advisement processes for adult students. Adult Student Services will promote additional opportunities for learning, and services tailored to adult learners via online, email and paper initiatives and representation at summer advising conferences, educational events at regional businesses, recruiting events and by coordinating workshops such as a “Back to School Workshop for Adults” held biannually to target adult high-ability students. Evening and Weekend Programs will promote enhanced student services and scheduling options including flexible delivery of course scheduling and degree programs, additional opportunities for learning at University recruitment events, via online, email and paper initiatives, representation at summer advising conferences and educational events at regional business. The University will assess regularly the effectiveness of adult student services and track enrollment, retention and graduation. The Director of Retention and Student Success will work with the Office of Institutional Research and the staff in the Office of Enrollment Management to improve communications and increase retention rates for adult learners. These goals will include at least 30% response rate for student surveys, identification of academic alerts about adult

learners and intervention for at least 75% of those alerts submitted by faculty.

In cooperation with the UK Employee Career Development Center, Adult Student Services will develop and implement innovative approaches in marketing and communication efforts targeting enrollment of UK employees wishing to achieve their academic goals. And, the Director of the UK Work-Life unit is working with the Student Government leadership to explore how to make available self-supporting childcare options for evening and weekend students while they attend UK classes.

In addition, the University plans to create a leave of absence category for undergraduate students allowing for adult learners to move in and out of the University more effectively as their outside life intervenes in their academic careers. A leave of absence could function as a zero-credit course – this way, the student can make sure the program wants them back (similar to study abroad or EXP courses) and this would keep students from having to re-apply, maintain their catalog year and ease pre-registration processes (and stop the regular recharging of these students every time they sit out a fall or spring semester). The Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education will discuss this option with the Undergraduate Council in Fall 2009.

OTHER ISSUES RELATED TO ADULT LEARNERS

- A. *Current Status:* The current status at UK of strategic partnerships with business and industry is primarily in relation to the University's research mission. The CAEL consultant strongly recommended that UK plan a strategy to develop additional relationships, partnerships, and collaborations with employers and other organizations in order to develop and improve educational opportunities for adult learners.

In addition, attention has lately turned to the fact that neither UK nor UK Hospital offers a child/dependent care facility on campus with adequate availability at the low cost most needed for the adult learner with dependents - yet numerous studies over the years (including most recently the President's Commission on UK Work-Life) show that UK benchmark institutions with higher retention and student success for both undergraduate and graduate students support these services. When UK Work-Life sent out an RFP for additional child care centers in 2007, vendors replied that they would require some financial investments from the University - the monetary sum would be negotiable, but the University would have to provide start-up money and negotiate some type of ongoing support, whether it be property maintenance or child care tuition subsidies.

- B. *Goals:* The University's goals in relation to strengthening strategic partnerships with employers and other organizations to improve educational opportunities are emphasized in the Strategic Plans and will certainly benefit our adult learners.

Student Support Services (TRIO) and the UK Work-Life Office plan to hold campus-wide

discussions about costs and benefits of a student cooperative for an on-campus child/dependent care program in collaboration with the Student Government Association and the Non-Traditional Student Organization.

- C. *Plans to Achieve Goals:* The University plans to provide additional centralized resources for the Project Graduate program by improving the enrollment and advisement processes for adult students. Adult Student Services will explore best practices in the use of an academic degree planner by adult learners so to improve recruiting, intake procedures -- providing more clarity in goal-setting and assuring more strategic planning for departments offering majors that are in demand. The Office of Enrollment Management will work with the Provost's senior staff to search for and purchase licenses for software that improves the University's current degree audit process. This new functionality should improve the intake process for Adult Student Services, supporting adult learners in planning, especially as they move to the appropriate advisors in the colleges. This functionality will allow students and advisors to create and maintain a detailed term-by-term, multi-year academic path to graduation. This software should also support the goals set by the business plan in identifying demands for niche programs. The search process should end in a successful contract by June 30, 2010.